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# Numenius on Intellect, Soul, and the Authority of Plato

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## Abstract

Plato's authority to post-Hellenistic Platonists is not that of a school-founder to members of his tradition (Platonists have no interest in the tradition as such): it is that of epistemic success in a system where such success can be emulated but not described. This is shown by the way in which Numenius' reflections on the history of philosophy depend on – and help to explain – his views about the soul's cognitive structure, and what it takes to grasp the forms.

## 1. Introduction

In an influential pair of articles, one in each of the two *Philosophia Togata* volumes, David Sedley shed new light on the issue of philosophical 'authority' and its importance for understanding school identity in the Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic age.<sup>1</sup> An assumption had prevailed before his work that the appeal to authority was characteristic of religions, something found among philosophers only insofar as they were more 'religious' than philosophical in spirit. The prime example was taken to be the Epicurean school whose members were supposed, on the basis of a double-edged compliment in Numenius, to have exhibited an unwavering and quasi-religious devotion to Epicurus.<sup>2</sup> But what David Sedley convincingly demonstrated is that the Epicureans were not the exceptions that Numenius had been taken to suggest: in fact every one of the Hellenistic schools subscribed, ostensibly at least, to the authority of their founder. No Stoic, for example, is ever caught suggesting that the founder of Stoicism, Zeno, was *wrong* about something: on the contrary, a Stoic might go to some lengths to show how their own view was consistent with that of Zeno.

This insight had a number of very important consequences for scholarship. First of all, it opened up a new range of questions that could be brought to the study of Epicureanism as a tradition – just because if (*pace* Numenius) Epicurean devotion to Epicurus was no more extreme than Stoic devotion to Zeno then, by the same token, the possibility for finding serious philosophical debate within the Epicurean school was no less than it was within Stoicism. Secondly, it undoubtedly helped in the slow process of rehabilitating interest in post-Hellenistic

Platonism, by normalising to some extent what might otherwise seem to be their alarming obsession with the views and *ipsissima verba* of Plato. So, for example, the striking turn to commentary, exhibited by Platonists as well as others of the period, can on Sedley's view be seen as a natural extension of Hellenistic school practice rather than a epochal deviation from it: Platonist commentaries served precisely the purpose of maintaining the identity of a tradition founded by Plato at a time when the mechanisms of the institutional school were no longer there to do it (1997).

But it seems to me important to make sure that this normalisation does not come at the price of excessive homogenisation. Plato may play a role for Platonists comparable *in some respects* to that of Zeno or Epicurus for their followers; but I am not so sure that the relationship is quite the same, just because it is not obvious that Platonists at this period see themselves as a 'school' or a 'tradition' in quite the same mould as the Stoa or Garden. There is scope to think that their interest in Plato is much more direct, and much more directly to do with a belief in his epistemic authority, and less to do with deference which he might be owed as the founder of their putative 'school'. One might put the point by suggesting that it is wrong to think that deference to Plato is a posterior entailment of subscription to the community of his followers, but rather that Platonism exists in the first place as a community of philosophers who put their faith in Plato.

One reason why one might want to consider matters in this light is the remarkable lack of interest that Platonists show in the school that Plato actually founded. Platonists never identify themselves as 'Academics' for example.<sup>3</sup> This cannot be explained by supposing that the word 'Academic' had acquired inalienable association with the Scepticism of the New Academy: on the contrary, the epithet is left free to default to this sense just because it is discarded by later dogmatic Platonists. (If it were the other way round, then it becomes inexplicable how Antiochus or Eudorus could be known as 'Academics'.)<sup>4</sup>

Historically-minded Platonists were interested in where the Academy fitted into the story, of course; and someone like Plutarch could argue that the Academy had in fact remained in faithful doctrinal alignment with Plato, and was thereby able to appropriate it to his own view of a continuous Platonic tradition.<sup>5</sup> But this is, I suggest, a *constructed* view – a retrospective appropriation of the Academy to a particular view of the history of philosophy – and not the description of a 'golden chain' by which Plutarch tries to legitimise his own connection Plato. If Plutarch's view were more widely shared, and especially if it also carried that weight of identity, we should certainly expect to hear more from those Platonists who disagreed with it – those do *not* think that the Academy always remained faithful to Plato as well. After all, they

would have at least as much investment in what is and what is not part of the pure ‘school’ tradition. To put this another way: if Plutarch were doing much what Philo of Larissa was doing to assert his philosophical legitimacy by arguing for the unity of the Academy, then we should expect to find other Platonists doing what Antiochus was doing when he argued against it as a way of asserting his. We do not.

The fact is that most Platonists show no discernible interest in the Academy at all. There is a very telling passage in Alcinous’ *Didaskalikos*, at the beginning of his discussion of ethics (27.1):

He [sc. Plato] thought that the most honourable and the greatest good is not easily found, and those who find it cannot express it without risk of misunderstanding to everyone [cf. *Ti.* 28c]. He himself passed on his teaching about the good to a very few, carefully chosen pupils. But if you read his writings carefully he placed our good in the knowledge and contemplation of the first good, which one might call god or first intellect.

Alcinous has a kind of ‘Tübingen’ moment here, and makes it clear that the best account a person could possibly have of the good would come from Plato’s own mouth. But it does not occur to him that a good source for the rest of us might be through teachings and traditions preserved in the Academy – or even that there might be traditions in the Academy that could help to interpret Plato’s writings. As far as Alcinous is concerned, Plato’s school might as well not exist. It is irrelevant. His own project is evidently to get as close as possible to direct contact with Plato himself: the closest for us that that can be is to read what he himself wrote.

When I tried to get to grips with this subject once before (Boys-Stones 2001), I argued that the difference between the Hellenistic schools and Platonism is that, for Platonism, the scholar’s authority is not only a matter of identity, but *also* a question of *philosophical methodology*. Platonists, I wanted to say, do not look to Plato because he was the founder or figure-head of the tradition in which they are working; they came to Plato and worked with him because (in brief) they believe that he knew the truths that it is the end of philosophy to seek. I tried to show that this was a reasoned move, not a matter of fideism; but the upshot was somehow the same: Plato’s authority is the *prior reason* for becoming a ‘Platonist’; it is not, as in Sedley’s picture of the schools, a badge one assumes in virtue of joining a particular tradition. In this paper, I would like to suggest that we can get to the same sort of conclusion by another route as well. My idea here is that a different view of philosophical ‘authority’ is more or less bound to accompany the particular views that Platonism has about the *aim* of philosophy, i.e. the cognitive achievement which constitutes success in philosophy. The basic point is that,

unlike the broadly ‘empirical’ schools of the Hellenistic era, Platonism does not think that philosophical understanding amounts to the acquisition of a body of *propositional* knowledge – the sort of knowledge that can, in principle, be preserved in a school tradition even by those who have an imperfect grasp of it. Rather, it is constituted by the achievement of a higher cognitive state (intellection) which has *non-propositional* objects (forms), objects which can only be known ‘by acquaintance’. In these circumstances, the authority one wants is precisely someone, some individual, who has themselves achieved a grasp of the forms, and who can try to articulate something of what the experience is like and how they came to achieve it. But this sort of account does not constitute a body of scientific knowledge of the sort that can be tested or improved by others, so that there is no value that can be added to it by the subsequent tradition. Plato is an ‘authority’ for someone who believes that Plato had seen the forms, and that they have access to what he was able to say in the light of the experience: there is no Platonism without these beliefs; but they have nothing to do with the existence or activity of any subsequent school or tradition. This alignment between epistemological theory and the question of authority is something that seems to have been quite consciously explored in the work of Numenius in particular. Indeed, their connection is so intimate that, as I hope to show in the next section, Numenius’ history of philosophy, and the reflections on philosophical authority that arise in the course of it, can actually help us to trace and understand the intricacies of his cognitive theory.

## 2. Numenius on soul and thinking

### *2.1. Three forms of thought.*

I said that Platonists think that *success* in philosophy is constituted by intellection of the forms; but that is not to deny that what one might call ‘applied’ philosophy, philosophy as a *dialectical practice* in a particular social context, involves chewing over propositions, just as it does for Stoics or Epicureans. Even a sage may have to deal with students or enemies, who do not (yet) share his vision of the forms; and any embodied philosopher at all needs to have true rather than false beliefs about the world in order to move about in it successfully. So if we are thinking about the *dialectical practice* of philosophy and how it will help us (the sort of thought that might lead us into the history of philosophy, indeed), one technical question which we might have early on is how exactly *discursive* thinking (διανόησις) relates to the sort of intellection (νόησις) that we are in pursuit of. In particular, what is the relationship between these two modes of thinking such that the former has any hope of leading us towards the latter?

The beginnings of an answer to that question for Numenius can be found in what he has to say about the relationship between the three *deities* of his metaphysical system – whose

characteristic activities are described precisely in epistemological terms. Commenting on *Timaeus* 39e (*‘Intellect* sees how many and what sort of ideas there are in the *essence of animal*, and *decided* that this [sc. the cosmos] should have just the same number and kind’), Numenius says this (fr. 22):<sup>6</sup>

Numenius aligns his first intellect with ‘essence of animal’, and says that it thinks by using the second. The second he aligns with ‘intellect’, and says that this, again, creates by using the third. The third he aligns with ‘deciding’.

The easiest place to start in unpacking this is with the second god, the creator of the cosmos.<sup>7</sup> It seems reasonable to suppose that, like the creator-god in other Platonist systems, this god is an intellect which contains, or is even identified with, the forms<sup>8</sup> – and as such, we can think of it as representing the ideal model, or perhaps the limiting case, for the sort of intellection to which even human beings can aspire – namely, the contemplation of the forms. The first god is an intellect *above* this one, probably to be identified with the form of the good. (This is not a mode of intellection to which we can aspire: if the second intellect is the limiting case of our cognitive abilities, the first god is the limiting case of what can be grasped by them: cf. esp. fr. 2.) Meanwhile, the third god, below the second, is identified with discursive thinking (διανόησις). As we shall soon see, this third god has a role in organising the empirical world as its soul (or one of its souls) – so the association with discursive thinking seems quite appropriate.

My question about the relationship between discursive thought and intellection, insofar as it is relevant to us, can be rephrased, then, as a question about how Numenius’ second god stands in relation to his third. This is something addressed in a fragment from Numenius’ lost work *On the Good* (fr. 11):

The first god, being in himself, is simple (ἀπλοῦς), and being together with himself throughout can never be divided. The god who is the second and third, however, is one (εἷς).<sup>9</sup> He comes into contact with matter, but it is dyadic and, although he unifies it, he is divided by it, since it has an appetitive and fluid character. Because he is gazing on matter, he is not intent on the intelligible (for in that case he would have been intent on himself); and by giving his attention to matter he becomes heedless of himself. And he gets to grips with the perceptible and is absorbed in his work with it, and by devoting himself to matter he takes it up even into his own character.

The basic scheme in this passage seems clear enough: the first god (the intellect that I am suggesting is more or less beyond us) lacks in complexity of any sort (so, is ‘simple’, ἀπλοῦς). The second god, which represents an intellect furnished with forms, presumably loses points for simplicity for that very reason; but it nevertheless manages to be an essential unity (a ‘one’, εἷς; maybe what Plotinus will call a ‘one-in-many’). Perhaps surprisingly, the third god – which we can now see takes the role of a world soul – *also* qualifies as a unity (εἷς), although it is, I take it, is what Plotinus would call a ‘one *and* many’. It deals with, and attempts to bring unity to matter, and does so by the explicit articulation of the forms present in the second god: their distribution in the realm of nature, as it might be. So, while the activity of the second god is *noetic* (stable contemplation of the forms), that of third is *dianoetic* – discursive.

So far so good. But note that Numenius does not just claim that the second god is a unity and the third god is a unity, but that they are *the same unity*. In some sense, the second and third gods – or rather, ‘the god who is the second and third’, is *the same god*.

Discussions of this passage have acknowledged (and worried about) the claim, but the temptation has always been to overlook it in practice.<sup>10</sup> Insofar as there is any consensus in the matter, the tendency is to imagine that the third god is engendered when the second god as it were ‘sinks’ into matter. In the process it is divided into the part that remains outside (the second god) and the part that is sunk (the third god).

But this view seems to me untenable. Apart from anything else, it suggests that intellect is ‘divided’ so that there really are two different gods – one in matter, one outside it, which is exactly what is denied when Numenius say that the third god *is* the second god. (The second god is produced in some way from the first god too – and whatever the process in that case, it does not *even* involve matter or the possibility of spatial distinction; yet Numenius does not say that the first and second gods are the same. How can division at the hands of matter preserve identity?) Conversely, of course, if the third god *is* the second god, why does Numenius not simply say that the second god enters the material realm – without bringing a *third* god into the picture at all?

## 2.2. *The role of matter*

In addressing the relationship of the divine with matter, it is important not to be too easily seduced by Numenius’ own metaphors of contact and absorption – or at least, we should remember that metaphors is precisely what they are. And we should remember too that, in Numenius’ system, matter contains its *own* principle of movement, which is presumably what is implied by his insistence that it is the source of evil in the cosmos (fr. 52, esp. 52.44-64). So there is a bottom-up story to be told about the cosmogony, not just a top-down story. Perhaps

what we should think is something like the following. The forms that exist eternally and without change in the second divine intellect effectively stipulate the patterns by which anything beyond them – any unified plurality – can exist. They do not as it were *force themselves* on matter willy nilly; but it turns out that matter, which is inherently in motion, moves according to these patterns just because *they are only patterns to move according to*. (In this sense, the radically chaotic motion in terms of which it is described is purely analytical: after all to move without *any* order is not really to move at all, just as to have no unifying structure is not really to be any thing at all.) This is a situation that we can describe equally well from the top down: forms bring order to matter. But all the ‘moving parts’ are – as they should be – at the bottom of the system. The ‘grappling’ of Numenius’ second god with matter is *really* matter’s (imperfect and fluid) assumption of the standard that this god embodies.

As far as this goes, Numenius is not all unique for his age: Atticus seems to think something similar, and so does Plutarch.<sup>11</sup> But Numenius does not follow Atticus and Plutarch to the easy conclusion that matter end up in possession of a single source of *orderly movement* – a single *world soul*. (Plutarch for example, thinks that the world soul just is the principle of motion in matter, namely radical world soul, but moving now in the light of the forms.) Numenius is evidently concerned that, if we say *this*, then we lose the explanation for there being evil and chaos in the world, as well as order and unity. The principle of evil is, as it were, neutralised out of existence in a cosmology like Plutarch’s.<sup>12</sup> This leads Numenius to his famously eccentric claim that the process of cosmogony does not result in the transformation of matter’s principle of movement into world soul, but that, instead, the principle of movement inherent to matter – call it ‘evil world soul’ – is *joined* by a good principle of movement – a good world soul. What we normally call ‘soul’ (whether in the case of world soul or, as it happens, individual soul) is really two souls: one evil, one good.<sup>13</sup>

It is often assumed that Numenius has in mind that these two souls are two distinct substances, or two actual motions which are in competition with each other. That seems to me implausible – as if in the analogous case of the human being the claim that there are two souls (fr. 44) amounts to the claim that there are two competing centres of will or consciousness. We can get away with something less drastic and more interesting if we assume that Numenius is rather insisting on an analytical point about the way matter moves under the influence of forms. He may be saying, not that there are *actual* motions, but that there are two actual (i.e. actually operative) *causes* of motion – which explain what (single) motion the ensouled body happens to have. The movement of an ensouled body in his view might be something like what we would call a compound motion, resulting from conflicting tendencies: a tendency towards plurality which is native to matter; and a tendency towards unity (order) which is given to matter by the



forms, or second god. In this case, the evil soul is the native impulse actually active within matter towards plurality and chaos; the good soul – the third god – is the acquired impulse actually active within matter towards unity and order.

Why put it the way Numenius does – why talk about there being *two world souls*? I suggest that one reason it is precisely to keep isolated in our minds that aspect of movement in the cosmos which is good, *and only that aspect*: because, if you think about *that* in sufficient abstraction from the cosmos, it turns out that you are thinking precisely of the forms.

And that is the basis for Numenius' claim that the good world soul (the third god) is identical with the second god. The third god is not an *imitation* of the second god, or a new substance mysteriously produced from it. *It is precisely the order that the second god is* – but insofar as it is a principle of the movement displayed by matter.

### 3. History of Philosophy

#### *3.1. From metaphysics to epistemology*

The foregoing may seem to have been a lengthy digression through the thickets of Numenius' metaphysics; but given the defining associations between modalities of thought and Numenius' second and third gods, it should start to be obvious that we now have in hand the tools for addressing the crucial question for philosophical practice in Numenius' epistemology, namely the relationship between discursive and intellective thought. If I am right that Numenius' third god just *is* his second god, insofar as he manifests as a principle for order in the material world, then it looks like we should conclude that successful discursive thinking (i.e. the activity associated with the third god) just *is* intellection (i.e. the characteristic activity of the second), but intellection insofar as it is the ordering principle involved in our comprehension of the empirical realm.

In other words: *insofar as* our discourse about things successfully reduces rebarbative empirical subject-matter to sense and unity, it is identical with intellection. This is an important result, not least because it allows us to give an answer to the old problem of whether, and how, a Platonist philosopher can maintain that intellection of the forms has any bearing on our dealings with the empirical world – whether and how it can improve our scientific or, indeed, our ethical understanding. On my account, what Numenius can say is that someone with their eye on the forms will be able to make *the best sense* of the empirical world too – and precisely in virtue of their grasp of the forms. The reason for this is that, *insofar as* their discursive thought has veridical value, it is identical with their grasp of the forms. At the same time, someone in search of knowledge can be led there through their discursive thinking, because the greater the veridical value in their thoughts about the world at this level, the nearer they come to cognition

of the forms themselves (which turns out to be something like the limiting case of veridical thought about the world). This is the process, in fact, that we call ‘recollection’.

### *3.2. From epistemology to the history of philosophy*

#### *3.2.1. Plato*

So Numenius’ metaphysics yields an epistemology that frames his understanding of philosophical practice. But what is especially interesting about Numenius is that he goes on to use this framework to reflect on actual philosophical practice – to construct a history of philosophy, which he put to work in a book attacking what was, in his view, the failure of the Hellenistic Academy to remain focussed on Plato – in the way that (as he anyway claims) the Epicureans remained focussed on Epicurus.

Consider what Numenius had to say in this book about the background to Plato’s own work, for example (fr. 24.47-55 and 73-9):

But long before them [sc. the Stoics], the same thing happened with those followers of Socrates who took different lines – Aristippus his own, Antisthenes his own, the Megarians and Eretrians variously their own, and whoever else there might have been with them. The reason is that Socrates posited three gods, and discussed them in rhythms appropriate to each. Those who heard him did not understand, and thought that he was saying it all without order, directed by the winds of chance as they blew here and there at random.

...

As a man who struck a mean between Pythagoras and Socrates, he [sc. Plato] reduced the solemnity of the one to make it humane, and elevated the wit and playfulness of the other from the level of irony to dignity and weight. He made this mixture of Pythagoras with Socrates, and proved himself more accessible than the one and more dignified than the other.

The picture we are presented with is Plato as a force for *unity* at a time when those around him were shooting off in different directions, ‘taking different lines’ (ἀφελκύσαντες διαφόρους τοὺς λόγους, 24.48-9). The dynamic between a unified truth on the one hand and forces of diversity on the other recalls that in Numenius’ metaphysics between intellect (the second god) and the evil world soul: Plato appears here as the ‘good world soul’ that emerges in their encounter.

One thing to notice here is the curious emphasis on Plato’s *style*: the ‘mean’ that he is meant to have struck between Pythagoras and Socrates concerns expression rather than content.

(Indeed, Numenius is quite clear that both Pythagoras and Socrates had a complete and perfect grasp of the truth: there was no improvement to content that Plato might have made.)

Numenius' point seems to be that, in the face of the disruptive challenge to the truth represented by Socrates and Pythagoras, Plato, the perfect philosopher in his own age, produces *new discursive material* – philosophical discourse appropriate to the times and the dialectical context, the particular attacks that philosophy then faced. His intellection remains steady and unmoved, but the way this translates into discourse depends on the nature of his 'material' context.

This is not the only passage in which Numenius shows an interest in how Plato's dialectical context affected his expression: for example, Numenius argues that Plato manages safely but also frankly to criticise Athenian theological views by representing them in the obnoxious person of Euthyphro (fr. 23). In other words: the Pythagorean / Socratic *truth* which Plato also has comes out in his engagement within a particular context as the *dialogues* we know and love. *The second god is the third*: his discourse *just is* the application of Pythagorean / Socratic truth in a realm of Athenian discord.

### 3.2.2. After Plato

But Numenius' history has a second chapter, and the dynamic traced for the post-Socratic generation recurs in the post-Aristotelian age. In his own time, Plato played third god to Pythagoras' second; relative to subsequent generations, *he* is now the second god, the more accessible embodiment of the truth; and the forces of division – the Hellenistic schools take over from the minor Socratics – operate with respect to him (fr. 24.55-73):

But Plato had Pythagorean training, and knew that Socrates derived it all from no other source than that, and that he understood what he said. So he too bound his subjects together in an unconventional manner, and did not set them out clearly. Treating each as he saw fit, he hid them in between clarity and obscurity. So he wrote in safety, but himself provided a cause for later dissension, and distortion of his doctrines, which happened not through envy or malice. But I don't want to speak dishonourably of the venerable. Now we have learnt this, we should apply our thought elsewhere and, as we set out to distinguish Plato from Aristotle and Zeno, so now, with the help of god, we shall separate him from the Academy, and let him be in his own terms, a Pythagorean. As things stand, he has been pulled to and fro in a frenzy more crazed than any Pentheus deserved, and suffers in each of his limbs;<sup>14</sup> but as a whole he never changes into something different from himself as a whole, or change back.

And so I take it that the message is that *we*, Numenius' readers, are now being invited to take on the mantle of 'good world soul': the philosophy that we are to do is aimed at applying unity (the unity that Plato embodies) to the factionalism of the Hellenistic schools. This is borne out by Numenius' explicit methodological recommendations to us in fr. 1a (a quotation, perhaps programmatic, from the first book of his *On the Good* 1):

On this matter, when one has set out a position and drawn one's conclusions, it will be necessary to retire into the testimony of Plato and bind it all together by the words of Pythagoras; and to call on the aid of those nations held in honour, as Plato did, adducing their rites and ordinances and their rituals of consecration – whatever Brahmins and Jews and Magi and Egyptians have organised.

#### 4. Plato's authority

But consider, finally, the implications of this. The second god *is* the third: Plato's dialogues *were* Socrates' philosophy (and Pythagoras'); ideally, our philosophising, then, *is* Plato's. If successful, our philosophising has the same identity relationship with Plato that the work of the good world soul has with divine intellect. Our philosophising will be Plato's truth, as properly expressed relative to the forces of division in our world. And it is this way of understanding what it is for us to do philosophy underpins what is distinctive of the notion of authority invested in Plato.

First of all, it explains what Sedley characterises as the 'religious' language which Platonists apply to Plato: Plato is commonly referred to as 'divine' for example; or as a 'hero' (i.e., exactly, a divinised human being). Now, this could be conventional hyperbole; Lucretius talks about Epicurus as a 'god' as well. But the language *ought* to have special resonance in the context of a philosophy whose formal definition of the end is *assimilation to god* (Alcinous, *Did.* 28.3 just for example). After all, if Plato was an ideal philosopher, then a Platonist would be bound to think that he actually had *become like god* – namely and concretely the divine intellect which sees, and perhaps contains, the forms by which the world was made. By the same token, of course, it means that coming to be like Plato will be one way of *our* coming to be like god. But we have seen that our aspiration is precisely to engage in philosophy which replicates Plato's position. Numenius calls us to 'become like' Plato, just as Plato became like Socrates and Pythagoras.

Next, this all explains in turn the general lack of interest among Platonists in Plato's school as such, and it explains the position expressed by Alcinous in *Did.* 27.1. A Platonist is not at all interested in the sort of information that a school could preserve. A Platonist is only concerned about what *Plato* himself, as Plato, has in mind. That is why Alcinous' impossible dream is to have been one of Plato's chosen pupils; and why, failing that, his recourse is to the works that Plato wrote: it is as near to the man as it is possible to get.

If I am right that Plato's authority for Platonists is not tied to his role as the founder of a school, a third thing that it is explained is that, although his epistemic authority is considered to be absolute, it is not considered to be unique. Unlike Stoics and Epicureans, Platonists are able, both in principle and practice, to recognise other figures who are *as authoritative as Plato*, figures who might serve equally well as the reference-point for their identity. According to Numenius, as we have seen, Plato himself looked to Socrates and Pythagoras as authorities: presumably the only thing that prevents us from doing so makes is the limited independent access we happen to have to them.

In fact Numenius himself, despite the cardinal role he gives to Plato in the history of philosophy and the absolute epistemic authority with which he invests Plato, and despite being treated by later Platonists to all intents and purposes as one of their own, apparently thought of himself as a Pythagorean, and was almost always referred to as such by others. This is a challenge to a rider David Sedley gives to his, 'school'-oriented definition of authority. Sedley formulated the rule that: 'acknowledged forerunners of one's primary authority could themselves bear secondary authority-status' ((1989) 101): a Platonist, for example, can recognise Pythagoras as an authority too. But Numenius' case is the other way round: the authority by which he constructs his identity, the 'primary' authority in Sedley's sense, is Pythagoras; Plato is supposed to *inherit* his authority in a subsequent generation. That he is no less authoritative for Numenius is explained if the notion of authority involved here is purely epistemic.

This last point has a corollary: if there can be multiple authorities, and if it is epistemic authority at issue here (perhaps with some qualifications concerning access), then there is no principled reason why *new* authorities should not arise. And in fact it seems that Platonists are unusually relaxed about this possibility. Take for example, the work of Nicomachus of Gerasa, another second-century philosopher known as a Pythagorean. His work achieved adulation among Platonists – which stops short of being 'authoritative' to be sure, but which comes remarkably close it, especially for someone who is not a self-describing Platonist. His *Introduction to Arithmetic* was translated into Latin in his lifetime (by Apuleius) (and again in the 6th C. by Boethius); it attracted commentaries by Iamblichus (who is prepared to correct

him), Proclus (who is not),<sup>15</sup> and by Asclepius and Philoponus, who in turn took their interest from their teacher Ammonius. A remark in Marinus' biography of Proclus (*Life* 28) seems meant to make us think that Proclus was a reincarnation of Nicomachus. That would be remarkable. We know that Platonists were not shy to praise one another as reincarnations of *Plato* himself<sup>16</sup> – and Marinus is not one to hold back. So if it is right that Marinus wants us to think that Proclus was a reincarnation of Nicomachus, then he is thinking about Nicomachus (and Proclus in turn, of course) as a reasonable proxy for Plato.

And finally, of course, there are the Chaldaean Oracles – another product of the second century AD. In a way these constitute an even clearer and more remarkable example of the phenomenon; there is no sense in which someone could argue that their authority derives from Plato (or Pythagoras), since they are supposed to derive from Apollo himself. It is true that not everyone takes them up, and we do not know if there were people in the second century who were aware of them but treated them with suspicion. On the other hand, we also never hear of anyone testing them against Plato and approving or rejecting them as a result. When they are used, they are used alongside Plato, but with an authority that is all their own.

### Epilogue

In another important article from 2003, dealing with the status of the Athenian schools in the post-Hellenistic era, David Sedley makes a distinction between movements that have their ancestry in the Hellenistic Athenian schools and those that do not. (The immediate example is Pyrrhonism.) Different rules, he allows, may apply in the latter case. I think that this is a tremendously important insight, because it allows that there are different things going on in the post-Hellenistic age, that movements appear which do not have their feet in the Hellenistic schools alongside those that do. (It is a serious impediment to the appreciation of the period that this diversity is not always recognised, with regrettably Procrustean results.) I think the principle applies, however, at a point in our evidence where I know he would not agree with me. One of strand of Sedley's view of the post-Hellenistic period is an insistence that Platonism should be seen as a continuation of the Academy – or, conversely, that the Academics are helpfully thought of as 'Platonists' too.<sup>17</sup> I am not so sure that they were, or that it should. Given how well developed even our earliest evidence for Platonism is, I suspect that the movement predates the 'end' of the Academy – or, perhaps, that its immediate ancestor in the Hellenistic age is not the Academy at all, but the 'Pythagorean' movement (about which we know far too little). In any case, I do not think that Platonism *is* one of those movements with its ancestry in the Athenians schools. (Seneca, who evidently knew about Platonism, quite clearly says that in his day neither the 'new' *nor* the 'old' Academy had surviving representatives: *NQ* 7.32.2.)

But *even if it is*, I have argued that it quickly came to think about many things – and philosophy itself – in a such a radically different way that it would actually be rather surprising if it inherited the ‘school’ sense of authority. Platonism brings into the post-Hellenistic age – or discovers it then, if you prefer – a notion of ‘authority’ that transcends historical narratives just as the truth to which they aspired transcended any historical context for the practice of philosophy. Plato is not ‘authoritative’ because his school matters: in fact, the identity *he* creates for Platonists, and the authority he represents for them means that his school does not matter at all.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Sedley (1989), (1997).

<sup>2</sup> Fr. 24.22-31 (here as throughout the paper, references are to the edition of des Places (1973)). Numenius himself uses the language of religion here: Epicureans, he claims, view it as an impiety, ἀσέβημα, to oppose Epicurus.

<sup>3</sup> This is true, at least, for all of our evidence after Antiochus and Eudorus, both consistently called ‘Academics’. But even if one allows that one or both are properly thought of as ‘Platonists’ (a term which attaches to neither in our evidence), it is easy enough to bracket them as exceptions in the very fact that they would be first-generation Platonists, operating when the Academy is still alive and well. Later on, the term ‘Academic’ might refer to a Platonist’s education (e.g. Plutarch, *On the E* 387F; Apuleius, *Florida* 15.26), but is never used of their affiliation. See in general Glucker (1978) 206-25.

<sup>4</sup> See previous note. For the use of ‘Academic’ to mean ‘sceptical’, see esp. Anon. in *Tht.* col. 54.40.

<sup>5</sup> This is suggested by the title of his lost work *On the Unity of the Academy* (*Lamprias* 63); cf. argument in *Against Colotes* 1121F-1122A with Brittain (2001) 225-36.

<sup>6</sup> Proclus, *On the Timaeus* iii. 103.28-32. Des Places’ rather severe excerpction omits the lemmatic context, and has led to a great deal of unnecessary controversy over the meaning of this fragment – including attempts at emendation by Krämer (1964) 85-90 which look plausible enough without the context, but unthinkable with it.

<sup>7</sup> This identification is supported by fr. 12, 15-17, 21; but commentators have sometimes sought the creator with the world soul (or the third god insofar as it helps to constitute the world soul): e.g. Dodds (1960); Opsomer (2005) 64-5.

<sup>8</sup> Although some place the forms with the first god: e.g. Ferrari (1995) 255; (2012) 122; Trabattoni (2010).

<sup>9</sup> For this translation, which trades on the difference between ‘simple’ and ‘one’, see Frede (1987) 1057 with Plotinus, *Enn.* 5.6.4.1. This difference is overlooked by the alternative, which finds a Pythagorean system of three ‘ones’ by translating: ‘The second god is also a third “One”’ (see e.g. Moderatus ap. Simplicius, *On the Physics* 230.34-231.5 with Brenk (2005) 37; Turner (2006) 32). Note, however, that on any account the second god ends up in an identity relationship with the third.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Frede (1987) 1057-8; Tarrant (2004) 186-7; Reydam-Schils (2007) 252-5.

<sup>11</sup> See esp. Atticus ap. Proclus, *On the Timaeus* i. 392.8-17; cf. Plutarch, *On the Procreation of the Soul* 1014B-E.

<sup>12</sup> See again fr. 52, which makes just this case.

<sup>13</sup> Fr. 52.64-75. Jourdan (2015) is unnecessarily sceptical about this claim, which can be seen to do real philosophical work for Numenius.

<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that Atticus, making a similar point about the unifying effects of Plato’s work, uses Pentheus as an emblem of *philosophy itself* (fr. 1.19-23). If we are to read these two deployments of the image against each other, in whichever direction, it suggests a close identification of Plato himself with the philosophical truth, an identification which plays to my argument that Platonists are interested in Plato the philosopher, not Plato the scholar.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Vinel (2014) 19, 51.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. inscriptions to Ofellius Laetus: *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 3816; *IK* 17.2 3901.

<sup>17</sup> So, for example, one of the ‘Three Platonist interpretations’ of the *Theaetetus* in Sedley (1996) is an interpretation supporting the Scepticism of the Hellenistic Academy.